Top Secret	25X1 25X1



DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

Top Secret

111 26 March 1967



Information as of 1600 26 March 1967

25X1

HIGHLIGHTS

Political activity in South Vietnam is intensifying as the constitutional process nears completion.

Allied forces reported a series of sharp engagements throughout the country over the weekend, resulting in over 400 enemy soldiers killed.

- I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Sharp engagements were reported over the weekend in widely scattered parts of South Vietnam with some of the heaviest fighting taking place in northernmost Quang Tri Province (Paras. 1-3). The VC ambushed two convoys along Route 1 within two hours on 24 March (Paras. 4-5). Three sharp contacts were reported in Operation JUNCTION CITY (Para. 6). Other significant activity reported (Paras. 7-10).
- II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
 According to a reported statement by Premier Ky, the
 Armed Forces Congress will meet on 27 March to complete
 the process of approving of the draft constitution
 (Paras. 1-2).

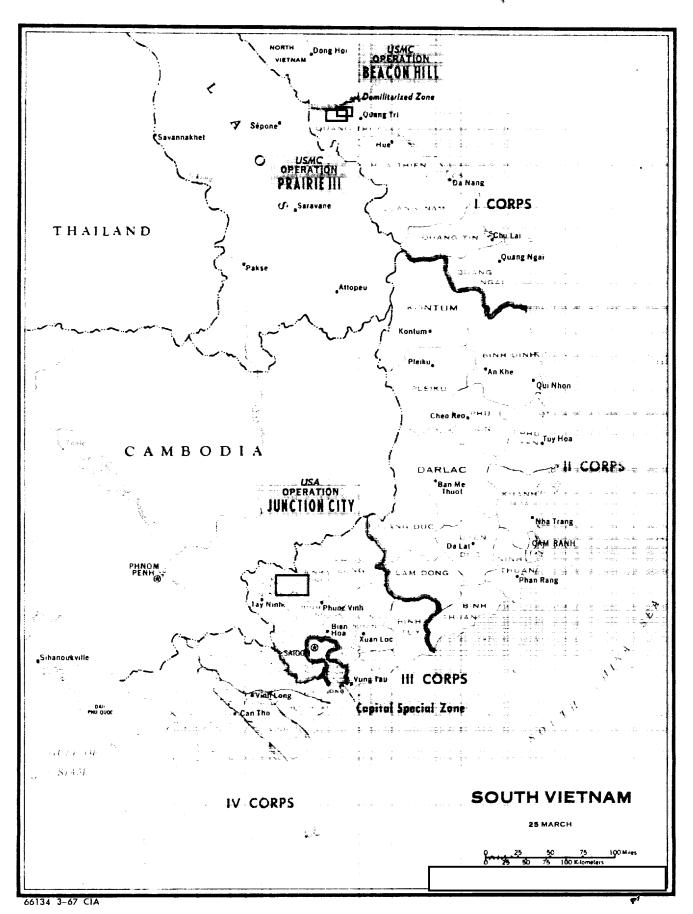
25X1 25X1

Former civilian premier Tran Van Houng plans to announce his presidential candidacy after the constitution is promulgated (Para. 4). A Buddhist funeral procession in Saigon today may be another step in testing reactions to increasing Buddhist political activity (Paras. 6-7).

25X1

- III. North Vietnamese Military Developments: US Air Force fighters may have shot down a DRV MIG-17 in the vicinity of Hao Lac Airfield (Paras. 1-3).
- IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.
- V. Communist Political Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

i



I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

- 1. US and South Vietnamese forces reported a series of sharp engagements with enemy forces over the weekend in widely scattered parts of South Vietnam. Some of the heaviest fighting took place in Quang Tri Province where US Marines are conducting Operations PRAIRIE III and BEACON HILL I.
- 2. In a series of four contacts on 24 March, marine elements in Operation PRAIRIE III reported killing 49 enemy soldiers while sustaining casualties of 18 killed and 89 wounded. All of this activity took place in an area some 10 to 15 miles northwest of Quang Tri city.
- 3. In the same general area, US marines participating in Operation BEACON HILL I reported killing 69 enemy soldiers in four contacts on 24 and 25 March. Marine casualties were nine killed and 56 wounded.

VC Ambush Two Convoys on Route 1

4. Viet Cong forces on 24 March successfully conducted two ambushes along Route 1 south of Da Nang, within a period of two hours, and within 900 meters of one another. A 39-truck US Marine convoy-en route from Chu Lai to Da Nang--was struck first when one of its vehicles was destroyed by a mine. US casualties were three killed and eight wounded. About 50 minutes after the marines received heavy enemy fire, a 94-truck South Vietnamese convoy was attacked by an unknown size enemy force. The convoy security force was driven off and the convoy was abandoned by the South Vietnamese. A reaction force sent to the scene was unable to break through to the convoy, and in an effort to prevent the enemy from seizing the convoy's supplies, some 14 tactical air sorties were directed against the trucks, resulting in the destruction or damage of at least 74 vehicles. South Vietnamese forces lost 11 killed, nine wounded and six missing in this ambush while enemy losses are unknown.

26 March 1967

I-1

Activity in Operation JUNCTION CITY

6. In a series of three significant contacts on 24 March, enemy forces succeeded in killing seven US and South Vietnamese soldiers while wounding 29. Enemy losses during these three engagements—which took place between 14 and 30 miles northeast of Tay Ninh city—were unknown.

Other Significant Activity

25X1

- 7. US Marines participating in Operation NEWCASTLE in the marine tactical area of responsibility south of Da Nang reported killing 42 enemy soldiers on 24 March while losing one killed and 35 wounded. Cumulative casualty totals for this operation which ended on 25 March are 118 enemy killed and 35 detained as against five marines killed and 55 wounded.
- 8. On 25 March, an infantry company of the US 9th Infantry Division engaged in Operation ENTERPRISE, contacted an estimated enemy company about 30 miles southwest of Saigon. The enemy broke contact after losing 40 killed in a three-hour fire fight. There were no US casualties.
- 9. About 90 miles north-northeast of Saigon on 24 March, two South Vietnamese Civilian Irregular Defense Group companies and Special Forces personnel landed by helicopter made contact with an estimated two enemy battalions. Seventy-three enemy soldiers were killed, while friendly casualties were light.
- 10. An estimated enemy battalion attacked two villages in the Mekong Delta some 50 miles west southwest of Saigon on 25 March. The villages were defended by a South Vietnamese Army battalion and a Regional Force company. Cumulative casualties in this battle were two South Vietnamese soldiers killed and 18 wounded. One US soldier was killed, eight wounded and two are missing. South Vietnamese forces reported killing 112 of the enemy. In addition, six US helicopters supporting the battle were shot down.

26 March 1967

-2

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

- 1. According to the official Vietnam press version of Premier Ky's impromptu interview with reporters on 24 March, Ky announced that the Congress of the Armed Forces would meet on 27 March to review the draft constitution—the final step in the ratification process before promulgation. Ky also commented that, since the congress "is not a political party," it was not in a position to name candidates for the coming elections. The Vietnam press story does not contain Ky's statement, allegedly overheard by two reporters, that he "has no plans" to run for president, but does quote him as denying rumors that there would be two military candidates.
- 2. Although the Armed Forces Congress is expected to approve the constitution without change, debate may be heated since, despite Directorate approval, dissatisfaction with the draft is still apparently widespread in military circles. Ky's characterization of the Congress as an improper vehicle to select candidates may reflect his wariness of letting the military hierarchy decide formally whether he or Chief of State Thieu should be the candidate, particularly in view of possible lingering resentment over his compromise with the Constituent Assembly.

Election Maneuvering

25X1

4. Vo Long Trieu, a strong supporter of civilian presidential aspirant Tran Van Huong, told a US Embassy officer on 23 March that Huong would definitely announce his candidacy shortly after the constitution is promulgated.

26 March 1967

II-1

Thieu said that a civilian "brain trust" is already at work on a political platform. According to Trieu, Huong--a former premier whose strength is in the so southern provinces--has ceased efforts to get a running mate from the VNQDD in order to balance his ticket geographically, and is now putting out feelers to Ha Thuc Ky, presidential hopeful of the central Vietnam - based Revolutionary Dai Viet Party, toward a joint slate. With regard to the military's candidate, Trieu expressed the opinion that Premier Ky, whose backers are working vigorously, has a decisive edge over General Thieu whose "penchant for caution" is causing his campaign to lag.

Buddhist Activity

6. According to press reports, police in Saigon on Easter Sunday barred a Buddhist funeral procession from moving to the An Quang Pagoda, the headquarters of the militants, until direct authorization was obtained from Premier Ky. Although few details are available, the orderly religious procession was probably designed as a test of Buddhist strength and of government reaction, a tactic used last year well in advance of the surfacing of the Buddhist political "struggle." An immediate underlying cause of the "demonstration" may have been the recent arrest of Tran Quang Thuan, a prominent young layman close to Tri Quang and other militants, as a draft dodger.

26 March 1967

II-2

25X1

25X1 25X1 Approved For Release 2007/06/05 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001800010001-5

7. There have been other indications that the Buddhists desire to resume political action, although they appear to be moving cautiously to avoid government reprisals. The Buddhists currently show little inclination to endorse or participate in the election

process,

Premier Ky

has indicated to Ambassador Lodge that he is considering authorizing a one-day cease-fire in order to avoid provoking the Buddhists, but that he may peg his response to an appeal from the moderate Buddhist wing.

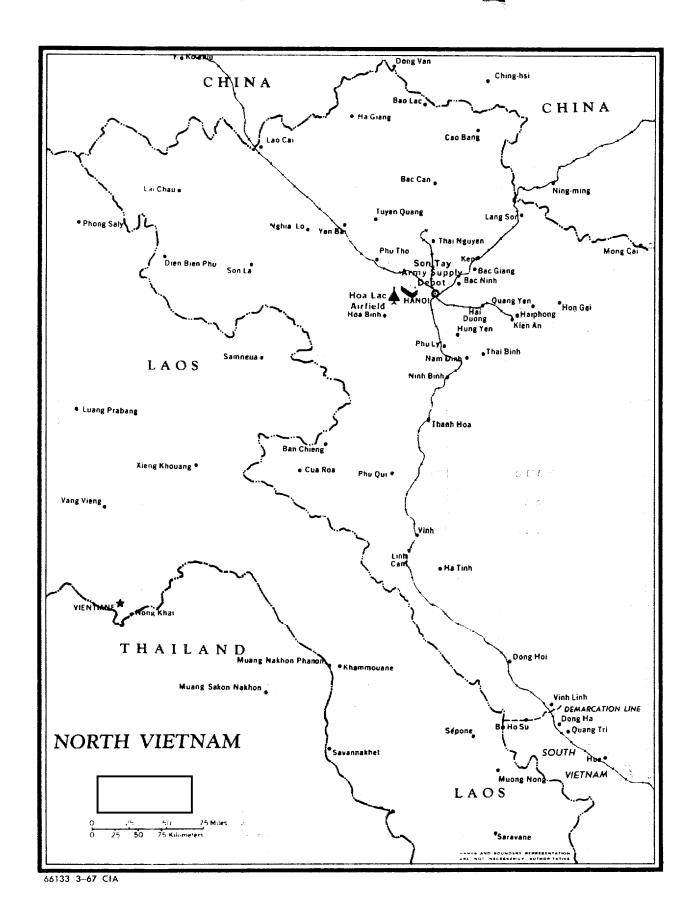
26 March 1967

25X1

II-3

25X1

Approved For Release 2007/06/05 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001800010001-5



III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

- 1. US Air Force fighters may have shot down a North Vietnamese MIG-17 on 26 March after a series of short aerial engagements in the vicinity of Hoa Lac Airfield. No US aircraft were lost.
- 2. The MIG engagements occurred while US aircraft were striking the Son Tay army supply depot. Pilots reported heavy antiaircraft artillery fire and surface-to-air missile activity near the target. In addition, there were six incidents of MIG sightings involving some 15 DRV fighters. These resulted in four air-to-air engagements.
- 3. Some of the DRV fighters encountered were seen taking off from Hoa Lac, the first time that fighters from this field have attempted to engage US aircraft. Hoa Lac has been operational for only a short period of time and it is believed that only 10 or 11 MIG fighters are currently based there.

26 March 1967

III-1

25X1	Top Secret	For Release 2007/06/05	: CIA-RDP79T00826A001800010001-5
		1	

Top Secret